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ABSTRACT

The program's long-range purpose was to enhance the Native American student's self esteem, and hence improve his ability to take advantage of opportunities in education and career development. Specific objectives were to develop in Native American students a strong sense of their heritage and culture; to operate an informational resource center for the use of Native American students and for teachers and others seeking curriculum materials on culture and history; to provide informational, tutorial and guidance services to assist Native American students to enter more career fields and to reduce the number of dropouts; to promote significant growth in basic English and mathematics skills as well as in other academic areas when needed; and to increase interaction and communication among Native American groups in New York City. The program was evaluated as to the degree to which each objective was achieved. Among the recommendations given were that during the coming year some effort be made to clarify with parent groups, children, and others what the program objectives should be, the priority among them, and how much program effort should be devoted to each; and accepting, as given, the problems posed for measurement by the Native American oral tradition and fear of testing, a number of substitute measures can, and should, be developed, i.e., in the tutoring program, the use of specific performance goals set by the tutor and the student, and more systematic record keeping in the resource center. (NQ)

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EVALUATION REPORT

Function # 21-79750

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NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION PROGRAM

1976-1977

Prepared for:

Board of Education, City of

New York

under Grant # 0849A,
Part A, LEA

Program Coordinator:
Mary Gaskin

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Program Objectives	1
Assessment of Outcomes	2
Heritage and Culture	2
Resource Center	5
Tutoring Program	5
Career Guidance and Counseling	6
Communication Among Native American Groups	7
Recommendations	7

Program Objectives

This New York City educational program to meet the special educational needs of Native American students is administratively located within the Center for Bilingual Education. The present evaluation report covers the third year of the program, 1976-1977.

Though there are a number of different statements of specific objectives and activities in the various materials available on the programs, its long-range purpose appears to be reasonably consistent: the enhancement of Native American student self esteem, and hence an improved ability to take advantage of opportunities in education and career development. In pursuit of that general purpose, the most immediate needs are viewed as:

1. the preservation of the culture and history of the North American Indian in the urban areas of the United States, and
2. an opportunity for Native American children of school age to learn about the contributions of Native Americans, which few schools are equipped to provide.

The specific objectives of the program exhibit less consistency and consensus. The five objectives stated below, however, appear in one form or another in the written materials and in interviews with the staff:

1. The development in Native American students of a strong sense of their heritage and culture.

2. The operation of an informational resource center for the use of Native American students and for teachers and others seeking curriculum materials on culture and history.

3. The provision of informational, tutorial and guidance services to assist Native American students to enter more career fields and to reduce the number of dropouts.

4. The promotion of significant growth in basic English and mathematics skills as well as in other academic areas when needed.

5. An increase in interaction and communication among Native American groups in New York City.

Assessment of Outcomes

An evaluation of the degree to which each of these objectives has been achieved in provided in the section below. Personnel changes, discrepancies in the perceptions of operating staff and proposal writers, cultural inclinations of the students, and perhaps the ambitiousness of some of the objectives themselves, have combined to make the task of evaluation a very difficult one, as will be noted at appropriate points in the discussion.

Heritage and Culture

The development in Native American students of a strong sense

of heritage and culture is by all odds the most important of the objectives, and a significant proportion of program effort is devoted to it. The staff perceives this objective in broader terms than a mere acquaintance with history and culture, but rather as "preparation for participation in Indian life." Individual and small group activities take place after school at the American Indican Community House in Manhattan, and on Saturdays at the Industrial Home for the Blind in Brooklyn.

A major emphasis is on the dance, and the songs and drum rhythms that are an integral part of it. Five dances of various types are taught, along with their social context, the cultural rationale for them, the traditional participants, and the costumes and songs appropriate to them. The dance is thus used as a vivid instrument to promote learning about the culture itself. It also provides the children with the skills necessary for participation in various tribal gatherings held at frequent intervals by the Native American community in the area. That the program sent approximately 50 children at a time to attend these pow-wows between January and May of this year evidences the considerable success of this part of the effort.

About 80 children are involved in the crafts program, which includes beadwork, leatherwork, regalia, loom-beading, finger-weaving, bonework, and fatherwork. Much of the work seemed to this evaluator very impressive. The children have also created dioramas of Indian life.

Difficulties earlier in the year that potponed the teaching of Indian languages have been overcome, and several classes in Mohawk have been underway this spring; two, for beginners, have 15 students, and an advanced class has enrolled 25.

Barriers to the expansion of this successful program element remain essentially technical recruiting problems. Native American children are scattered thinly through the schools of five boroughs of the city and gaining access to them, even identification of them, is very difficult. The latest census by the Board of Education counted about 750 of these students, but the program staff is undoubtedly correct (given the methodology of the census) in believing this an undercount. A related further difficulty is the technical requirement involved in having the Indian Student Enrollment Certification filled out by each student, without the knowledge of which students are eligible.

Satisfactory progress toward at least a partial solution for these problems appears to have been made. The Board has agreed to conduct another census, and the staff has mounted an intensive recruitment drive involving all available media.

In the absence of pre- and post-testing of self-concept changes the evaluation of this important component of the program must depend on the voluntary participation and product evidence already cited. This evaluator believes, in fact, that an unvalidated self-esteem inventory, even if one had been developed, would be unlikely to be of much value in this context.

A 20-item test of information was administered to a small group of student participants earlier in the year, but no post-test has been given. The low priority given to such measures by the staff stems from their conviction not only that the Native-American oral tradition renders the measure invalid, but that knowledge items do not measure the programs significant purposes. Entirely aside from these objectives, the small number of both the items and the pre-test group discouraged any effort to obtain post-tests on the same children.

The Resource Center

The Program has established a substantial collection of books and materials at the American Indican Community House on the history and heritage of Native Americans. Although no systematic records of use have been kept, staff report that not only do students check out materials but the center is being used as a reference source by groups and institutions in the city. Among the materials of special interest that have been developed are several small travelling exhibits which are available for classroom use by interested teachers.

Tutoring Program

The staff believe that an individual tutoring service should be available to students who express a need for it, although they do not see it as an important part of the program as a whole. They estimate, however, that of the total number of

Native American students identified as such in the school system perhaps as many as 400 need some form of academic help.

Thirty children are currently being served by this component, most of them in English and mathematics. A few are being tutored in Spanish, social studies, or history. Six students take advantage of the service in their own school setting, but most tutoring goes on after school at the Community House.

There is no way at present of evaluating this component, since no pre- and post-measures are given to the students. The staff are particularly firm in their beliefs that, especially in academic areas, Native American children are so fearful of written tests that they would have difficulty keeping them in the program if they insisted on such measures. Further discussion revealed that they had tried the services of experts in the reduction of test anxiety, to no avail. The evaluator obtained some confirmatory evidence of the existence of test anxiety in talking with one of the students. This problem will be raised again in the section on recommendations.

Career Guidance and Counseling

This is another objective that the staff considers desirable but peripheral. Several students have been referred to appropriate agencies for career counseling, but little else has been done.

Communication Among Native-American Groups

This objective is perceived as far more central to the major purposes of the program, and the staff are justifiably proud of the degree to which the program has increased contact among tribes that bear traditional prejudices against one another. The evaluator can attest to at least one instance of this activity, through his presence, by invitation, at a Saturday evening "Giveaway," a version of the potlatch ceremony at which participants give presents to one another, then perform a dance together. Fifteen separate tribal groups he was informed, were represented among the adults and children at the gathering, a substantial evidence of the interaction fostered by the program. Many of the gifts had been made as part of the crafts program.

Recommendations

1. Recycling is recommended, with the suggestion that during the coming program year some effort be made to clarify, with parent groups, children, and others, what the program objectives should be, the priority among them, and how much program effort should be devoted to each. There seems to be little utility in maintaining paper objectives toward which little is done in the program itself.

2. Appropriate steps appear to be underway to resolve some of the problems noted with identification and recruitment. A

related difficulty, that of gathering all program activities into one central Manhattan location, is due to the technicality involved in obtaining a certificate of occupancy at the Community House. Appropriate pressure by the Board on the relevant city agencies on this matter is strongly recommended.

3. Accepting, as givens, the problems posed for measurement by the Native American oral tradition and fear of testing, a number of substitute measures can, and should, be developed. Program staff might consider some of the following suggestions, or think of others themselves:

a. In the tutoring program, the use of specific performance goals set by the tutor and the student is recommended. A record of the goals established can relatively easily be maintained by the tutor, and checked off in the course of the tutoring as the student shows evidence of having mastered the skill. A general assessment of progress in the tutorial program can be made at the end of the year in the form of a percentage of tutoring objectives attained.

b. The staff is quite ready to present anecdotal evidence of growth in individual students involved in the program, and if a way could be devised to systematically record these kinds of observations some of the present program assessment problems could be overcome. They might experiment with a

briefer version of the "treatment plan" system used in health facilities, in which observations and contacts by a number of staff members related to the same client are recorded over periods of time in a central record.

c. More systematic record keeping in the resource center might also be useful. A contact log beside the phone, and another at the desk at which materials are checked out, would require little effort to maintain and would over the long run constitute a valuable record.